

Lincoln MPO Officials Committee

Thursday, August 23, 2012

Report on the Technical Committee discussion on the possibility of initiating Biennial MPO Programs for the Transportation Improvement Program and Unified Planning Work Program to match the local two-year budgeting cycle

At the Lincoln MPO Officials Committee of June 21, 2012, staff was asked to look into and consider the development of “Biennial MPO Programs” to match the local two-year budgeting cycle. According to federal regulations, the development of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) on a two-year cycle is allowed. However, there are conditions and requirements for Federal, State and MPO coordination and approvals. A forum was arranged for the MPO Technical Advisory Committee to discuss and get feedback from the committee on the possibility of developing biennial programs.

Transportation Improvement Program

All Metropolitan Planning Organizations, in cooperation with the State and the public transportation operators, is required to develop a TIP for the metropolitan planning area. For the Lincoln MPO this includes all of Lancaster County. The TIP is to cover a period of no less than four years, be updated at least every four years, and be approved by the MPO and the Governor. The TIP may be updated more frequently, but the cycle for updating the TIP must be compatible with the State-TIP (STIP) development and approval process. The MPO TIP expires when the FHWA/FTA approval of the STIP expires.

TIP revisions. The MPO may revise the TIP at any time under the agreed to procedures that are consistent with the procedures established for TIP development and approval. Public participation procedures consistent with MPO transportation planning process are to be used when revising the TIP with the exception of administrative modifications.

TIP relationship to the STIP. After approval by the MPO and the Governor, the TIP is included by reference in the STIP and a copy is to be provided to the FHWA and FTA. The current Lincoln TIP update process meets the NDOR thresholds as identified in the “Guidelines for Development of the Nebraska Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)” adopted by NDOR in 2011. This NDOR policy calls for the STIP to be developed annually through a cooperative effort with its three Nebraska metropolitan planning organizations.

Unified Planning Work Program

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) identifies transportation planning activities and programs that will be conducted within the MPO metropolitan planning area. The UPWP outlines planning activities that help provide a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive (3-C) transportation planning process within the planning area. Federal funds are made available to MPOs to accomplish transportation planning activities. Transportation planning activities performed with these funds in an urbanized area designated as a TMA (population > 200,000), must be documented in a UPWP.

Each MPO, in cooperation with the State and public transportation operator, is to develop a UPWP that includes a discussion of the planning priorities facing the planning area. The program is to identify work proposed for the next one- or two-year period by major activity and task, in sufficient detail to indicate who (e.g., MPO, State, public transportation operator, local government, or consultant) will perform the work, the schedule for completing the work, the resulting products, the proposed funding by activity/task, and a summary of the total amounts and sources of Federal and matching funds.

Nebraska Department of Roads and FHWA Discussion

At the MPO Technical Advisory Committee meeting, NDOR staff stated that they have had internal discussions on Lincoln's request and commented that there are several things that they need to consider before deciding this request. Their comments are meant to critically evaluate this issue and should not be construed as saying yes or no. The State is open to the idea but would like to have a continued discussion on the topic.

One key concern of the State is their continued role in coordinating the local TIPs with the STIP. The State has a \$270 million program that they are juggling and this large of a program that requires a great deal of oversight. A critical aspect of this is the coordination of the MPOs update cycle. The annual update cycle brings the local and state programs together for public review during the summer months and for FHWA/FTA approval in September. They see problems with having different update cycles for the MPOs and all will need to agree on any change.

It was also noted that the new Surface Transportation Bill (MAP-21) will end in FY 2014 which only covers two years. This raises the concern that transportation funding would go into another round of continuing resolutions which means they may have a hard time knowing what funding will be available. The issue is maintaining a financially constrained TIP by year which may place an additional burden on a Biennial TIP process.

Justin Luther from the FHWA stated that other states have biennial programs. Florida, for example, coordinates biennial TIPs and one of the issues they face is that there are numerous revisions in the second year. This would be something to do more research on because this could result in more paperwork and amendments to maintain the TIP.

The State would like the Lincoln MPO to show why they want to move to a biennial TIP and to demonstrate the efficiencies and benefits that would be gained in a two-year TIP update cycle. They proposed that Lincoln use time at the annual MPO coordination meeting in December to discuss this proposal. This will allow the other three MPOs weigh in on changing to a biennial process. Luther from the FHWA offered to provide information at the annual meeting on the efficiencies that may be gained and how this has worked for other states.

There was less discussion on converting to a biennial UPWP, but it was noted that federal funds are allocated annually and funding was tied to the program through MPO agreements with NDOR. Changes in federal requirements may easily allow agencies to convert to a two-year program format but the second year may need to be based upon an estimate. Actual funding for the second program year may still require new or amended funding agreements with NDOR.